

CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

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DENMARK

Denmark's Fifth Woman Pastor.

Since the law permitting women to hold clerical office in the Danish Lutheran National Church was passed in 1948 only four women theologians have become pastors. However, the fifth woman pastor has just been appointed.

The parochial church council in Bregninge on the island of Tåsinge in the diocese of Funen has nominated Elisabeth Fabricius, B.D., as assistant pastor for one year to the rector Rev. Juul Sørensen. The Government has appointed her and she was ordained on December 18th. The ordination has caused no difficulties because the bishop of the diocese, the Rt. Rev. H. Øllgaard, is willing to ordain women.

New Bill Suggesting Tax Exemption for Gifts to Church and Humanitarian Purposes.

Through their joint committee 23 church organisations have suggested to the Parliament's assessment committee that gifts to humanitarian, social, and religious purposes be exempted from taxation so long as the amount given does not exceed 5% of the donor's taxable income.

According to present legal usage donations to such purposes have been exempted from taxation when given on the basis of contractual commitments. Where the gift was fixed at a certain annual amount it was, however, on the condition that the commitment was for life, and where the size of the gift was determined as a certain percentage of the taxable income, exemption was only given in cases of contracts covering at least 10 years.

A new assessment bill just introduced by the Minister of Finance suggested that the present practice be abolished, so that no exemption of this kind be given, but there have been protests from many quarters and everything seems to indicate that some tax exemptions for gifts to humanitarian and religious purposes will be given in the new assessment law, though probably not to the extent suggested by the church organisations.

Faroe Islands to Have New Hymnal.

The Faroe Islands, which constitute an independent county on the same footing as the other Danish counties and in church matters constitute a deanery under the diocese of Copenhagen, are now to have their own Faroese hymnal. The Faroe islanders have preserved their own language beside the official Danish language, and as Faroese is the daily language of most of the population it is natural to have a Faroese hymnal. It is now ready for printing and contains about 400 hymns. The Faroe Islands have 35.000 inhabitants.

The Baptists Wish to Teach Religion in the Primary Schools.

The mission committee of the Danish Baptist Church has sent a petition to the Minister of Education, Mr. Jørgen Jørgensen, asking that the Primary School Act be amended so that in future teachers who belong to the Danish Free Churches will be permitted to teach religion in the Danish primary schools.

Until now the law has decreed that only teachers belonging to the Danish Lutheran National Church can teach religion in the primary schools, but that if the parents so desire, pupils may be excused from taking part in the religious instruction given in the school.

The mission committee of the Baptist Church asks whether it is not contrary to the Constitution's paragraph on freedom of conscience that teachers belonging to the Free Churches be prevented from giving religious instruction. The committee points out that most teachers belonging to the Free Churches have very fine marks in religion, and that many of them have been accustomed from their youth to teaching children through their service in Sunday schools belonging to the Free Churches. It is also pointed out that religious instruction in schools should not be one-sided and standardized, but of a common Christian character.

The National Church has so far opposed this wish expressed by the Free Churches, maintaining that when 97% of the country's population stand as members of the Lutheran National Church, it must be right that the religious instruction of their children in school be given by teachers who themselves belong to the National Church. Free Church members can have their children excused from the religious instruction in school and instead provide such instruction as they wish.

The question will undoubtedly be discussed in the near future in Parliament, which is at present discussing a new Bill regarding the organisation of the primary schools introduced by the Minister of Education.

FINLAND

Church Campaign Planned in Helsinki (Helsingfors).

The Swedish congregations in the Finnish capital are planning an extensive church campaign for February 18th - 23rd, 1958. In that week a number of large meetings and services are to be held to which all members of the Swedish congregations in Helsinki (Helsingfors) will be invited personally. The invitations will be brought out to the 20.000 homes by laymen who have offered their services for this purpose and in the coming weeks they will be given some training to fit them for this "visiting service".

A special committee has been appointed to prepare the campaign with Dean Max Oterdahl as chairman and the Rev. Rune Söderlund as secretary. The aim of the campaign is to bring church members who have grown away from the church back to active participation in church life, and the visiting service is to be continued after the campaign week, too.

This will be the first large campaign of its kind in Finland.

Increase in the Number of New Divinity Students.

From some recently published statistics it appears that 437 students of theology have matriculated at the two theological faculties in Finland, 400 of them in Helsinki (Helsingfors) and 37 in Turku (Åbo). No less than 88 young men and women, 78 of whom speak Finnish and 10 Swedish, have enrolled this year for the study of theology. This is a gratifying increase as compared to the previous years.

Exhibition of Finnish Church Architecture at Tampere (Tammerfors).

Last month the diocese of Tampere (Tammerfors) co-operated with the Finnish Museum of Architecture in the arrangement of an interesting exhibition of Finnish church architecture at Tampere (Tammerfors). The exhibition gave an extensive and varied impression of the development of church architecture in its effort to achieve beauty, simplicity and truth. The architect responsible for the exhibition, Mr. Seppo Rihmala, declared in connection with the opening of the exhibition that the Finnish Church had never been so near to finding through its architecture the expression of the central thoughts of Lutheranism as it is to-day.

"Spiritual Days" for Finnish Officers.

The annual "spiritual days" for Finnish officers from the whole country were held this year at Hyryläs garrison at Tusby. The leader of the meeting was army bishop Toivo Laitinen. In his address to the meeting on behalf of the officers' association Major-General O. Huhtala said that the association still had on its programme "the advancement of the officers' spiritual days", and that it was good to see the activity in this field. Those who have taken part in our wars, said the General, know that in war play is not enough, but faith is needed, and that this is true of the individual as well as of the nation. The saying is true that so long as pastors and officers remain true to their calling our country will endure.

The Christian Folk High School in Helsinki (Helsingfors) 50 Years Old.

The fiftieth anniversary of the capital's Christian Folk High School was recently celebrated in Helsinki (Helsingfors) and indeed by the entire Finnish folk high school movement for which the Christian Folk High School in the capital has done much of the pioneer work. Since the church revival movements have drawn the folk high schools into their service, the number of Christian folk high schools has increased to 36. In all there are 84 folk high schools in Finland. The number of pupils in the avowed Christian schools is 2060, whereas the total number of pupils in all the schools is 4566.

The Folk High school in Helsinki (Helsingfors), which was the first Christian one, was founded at a time when a strong anticlerical movement was prevalent in the country, not least within the working classes, and the school was one of the Church's answers to the challenge.

Great Activity to Promote Christian Care of the Disabled.

The Finnish Society for Home Missions in Pieksämäki last month celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the society's home for the disabled. A number of prominent persons from Finland and other countries gathered for the celebrations. The principal speech was given by Bishop E. Sormunen.

The home for the disabled is at present being enlarged. According to the plans it is to comprise some 30 buildings with a total area of 100.000 m². In all, the home should have room for 650 - 700 patients. So far 2/3 of the plan have been realised, and among other things a small church has been built for money specially collected for this purpose.

ICELAND

Four New Churches Completed in 1957.

No less than four new churches have been completed in the past year in Iceland, i.e. the churches in Hrutafjörður, Svalbardseyri, Saurbaer, and Hvammstangi.

The new cathedral at Skálholt, the corner-stone of which was laid on July 1st, 1956, is now under construction. The 25 meter high tower of the cruciform church can be seen for miles around. The roof of the church is to be composed of slate donated by Norwegian institutions and individuals. Friends of Iceland in Denmark have given two stained glass church windows to be executed by Icelandic artists. The plans for the new cathedral were drawn by the State architect Mr. Hjörður Bjarnason.

NORWAY

The Home Mission Continues to Oppose Religious Co-operation with Bishop Schjelderup.

The action taken by the voluntary church convention in the "Schjelderup Case" (mentioned in the last number of CN), has to some extent clarified the situation, but everything seems to indicate that the bishop will continue to be the centre of unrest. The Home Mission (Indre Misjon), which is an important pietistic organisation within the Norwegian National Church, has thus declared since the meeting that it must continue to reject all religious and voluntary co-operation with the bishop, although it does not demand his resignation, and for this reason it will continue the necessary co-operation with him as an official of the Church.

In other quarters this attitude is called a kind of boycott and considered unjustifiable in view of the fact that the resolution passed by a large majority at the church conference establishes the fact that the Church as such will continue to be and desires to be true to the Lutheran Confession and the Scriptures, although the diverging statements made by a clergyman or a bishop do not result in a demand for his withdrawal.

The Home Mission takes its stand on the passage in the resolution regarding co-operation with persons whose opinions on certain points are divergent from the Confession, where it is stated that in such cases one must act according to one's own conscience in the sight of God.

The background of the conflict is, as has been mentioned before, that Bishop Schjelderup does not think that perdition can be identical with eternal punishment in hell, as this would conflict with faith in God's love.

In his speech at the church conference Bishop Johs. Smemo, Oslo, had maintained as his view that when it was a matter of deviations on less central points, as in the present case, it must be possible to co-operate in spite of divergent opinions, and he declared that personally he found it impossible "to divide oneself and one's service into two parts and to have one conscience as a church official and another as a voluntary Christian worker."

In a statement issued by all of Bishop Schjelderup's colleagues they point out that no responsible authorities or persons have demanded Schjelderup's removal, and that they will continue to co-operate with the bishop. They do not feel themselves able to give others any instruction regarding co-operation, as other people's consciences must be respected. "But a heavy responsibility will fall on anyone on either side who, once the necessary clarity has been established, does not do his utmost to avoid continuing or reopening the conflict", the statement ends.

A large section of the daily press has launched violent attacks against the church conference and especially against Bishop Smemo who is accused of malice and persecution, because he dissociated himself from the views of Bishop Schjelderup and indicated that it was against

the confession. Hence it is refreshing to see that Bishop Schjelderup has publicly expressed his deep conviction that Bishop Smemo as well as the other bishops have acted in accordance with their feeling of responsibility towards the church. Bishop Schjelderup states that he will remain as bishop, as he has received the distinct impression that the majority of the congregations in the diocese wish him to stay. He also interprets the reaction after the church conference as a strong desire for greater latitude within the National Church, and appeals to those who had considered withdrawing from the National Church in protest against the action taken by the church conference not to do so.

Bishop Eivind Berggrav, who was one of the 29 at the church conference that voted against the resolution, has in a review of Bishop Schjelderup's book "Den grund, hvorpå jeg bygger" ("The foundation on which I am building") characterized him as belonging to "the Confession's basic type" and declared it to be untrue even to describe him as a humanist. "Church history has never known a more Christian heretic", writes Bishop Berggrav.

Great Unrest Regarding Appointment of a Bishop in Agder.

As a continuation of the unrest regarding the church conference and Bishop Schjelderup a lively discussion arose towards the end of November concerning the Government's appointment of a new bishop in Agder. The new bishop is Secretary General Karc Støylen from the Norwegian Mission to Seamen, who was only number 5 in the election, whereas Rev. H.E. Wisløff, who came out as number 1 in the election, received about four times as many votes.

To be sure, according to law the election of a bishop is only intended as a guide to the Ministry of Church Affairs, but it was generally felt in church circles that so clear a manifestation from the voters as is the case here, where Rev. Wisløff had received many more votes than any of the other candidates, must be respected if the election of bishops is to have any meaning whatsoever.

The reason for the Government's decision is considered to have been unwillingness to appoint Rev. Wisløff as bishop because he is known as a supporter of the Home Mission. Some newspapers have characterized Secretary General Støylen as liberal, but this is quite misleading, and he calls himself "neo-orthodox", rooted in the Church as a Confessional Church concentrated around the Gospel and sacraments.

The organ of the Social Democrat Government "Arbeiderbladet" has pointed out in defence of the appointment that Støylen "had support in a strong public opinion" as several local papers in the diocese had given him their support, and that in law the Government is left free to make such appointments and has often made use of this freedom before. But the Christian dailies "Vårt Land" and "Dagen" maintain that the Government's decision is a serious infringement on the limited democratic freedom given to the State Church through the reorganization after the War. The papers refer to the number of votes cast by parish council members and pastors and to the fact that Secretary General Støylen was not nominated by the diocesan council. However, Karc Støylen is welcomed on all sides as a well-qualified bishop, it is only the way in which he was appointed that does not meet with approval.

It has furthermore aroused a good deal of attention that 7 of the 9 bishops - according to unofficial information - in their recommendations to the Ministry prior to the appointment are said to have supported Kåre Støylen. "If this is true", writes "Vårt Land", "we shall be faced by the fact that the bishops consider the election unimportant, and that they have thus greatly contributed to undermining the organisation of the Church for which they have themselves fought".

Bishop Andreas Fleischer Died.

The former bishop in Bjørgvin, the Rt. Rev. Andreas Fleischer, has died 79 years old. Andreas Fleischer was bishop from 1932 - 1949.

The Norwegian King to Be Blessed, But Not Crowned, in Nidaros.

The new Norwegian King Olav the Fifth has decided not to let himself be crowned in Nidaros Cathedral as his father King Haakon was in 1906. The reason for this decision is the democratization of the kingdom brought about through the Constitutional Amendment in 1908. However, the King has announced that on June 22nd, 1958, the anniversary of his father's coronation, he will take part in the service in Nidaros Cathedral and there receive a "solemn blessing" on his royal calling.

The Christian daily "Dagen" has welcomed the announcement of the King's decision regarding it as the expression of the King's desire to confess in this way that he seeks power from God and puts his trust in God, and that in this too he will follow in his father's footsteps.

News From the Norwegian Mission Field in China.

A Norwegian woman, Mrs. Aadel Brun Tschudi, has recently had the opportunity of visiting the former Norwegian mission field in China in the district of Hunan. She spoke with several church leaders and members of the congregation and reports that regular services and meetings are being held in all former principal mission stations and in quite a few of the secondary stations. However, there is not much possibility of carrying on evangelizing work outside these centres, and the Chinese pastors do not have permission to go out and visit the congregations in the country districts and the villages. In several places she learned that many people were receiving instruction before baptism. The Christians stuck together as far as it was possible, and most of them were in good heart. In the capital Changsha and in one of the other principal stations the church was still being used for services, but most of the other church buildings were in ruins through lack of care and maintenance, or they were being used for other purposes. Services were then held in other rooms, chapels, parish halls, or private homes; in one place the congregation had even built a new chapel.

The institutions formerly belonging to the Church, such as schools and hospitals have been taken over by the civil authorities and this is also true of former missionary homes. The congregations only have the right of disposal over what is needed for the church itself, though in some places they do get rent from certain buildings and this income is used for salaries for parish workers, etc.

Devotional Meetings in the Lunch-hour of 50 Business Concerns in Oslo.

No less than 50 business concerns in Oslo have now devotional meetings for their employees in the lunch hour, states the vice chairman of the Union of Christian Workers, Pastor Ragnarwald Forbeck. It may also be noted that 5-6 of the Union's members were elected into Parliament in the recent elections.

SWEDEN

Bill Regarding Women Pastors Soon to be Laid Before Swedish Parliament.

Within the first few months of the new year the Swedish Government is expected to lay before Parliament a Bill allowing women to apply for office in the Swedish Lutheran National Church. This is made clear from the reply recently given by the Minister of Justice Mr. Lindell to a question in Parliament regarding the Synod's right of veto.

According to present legislation the Swedish Synod has the right of veto on bills regarding church matters passed by the Government. The questioner was of the same opinion that has been put forward in part of the press that there was no reason why the veto should be retained when it was used to "block reform regarding which the entire nation otherwise is practically agreed". In his reply the Minister pointed out that an investigation on the relation between Church and State is at present being prepared, and that one should not commit oneself as to the Synod's powers before this investigation was made. Hence the Government does not at present wish to introduce a Bill changing the present regulations.

Like several Free Church papers the liberal daily "Morgon-Bladet" which is sympathetic to the Free Churches has come out strongly in favour of preserving the veto. It points out that it cannot be in the interest of the Church to make it still more dependent on the State than it already is.

If the Government introduces its Bill next spring a new Church Synod will probably be held already next autumn to reconsider the question which was discussed so eagerly a few months ago. (See CW No. 31 and 32.) The former Minister of Church Affairs, Mr. Persson, has warned against forcing the matter, as he feels that a new discussion in the Church Synod will be far more likely to lead to a positive result if the second meeting does not come too soon after the first one. "Morgon-Bladet" insists that no kind of threat against the Church Synod should be made by the State, as the most fruitful results can be expected from a free exchange of opinions.

A discussion arising from a question in Parliament regarding the proposed statement of the relation between Church and State has caused a lively discussion of the Church Synod's refusal to recognize women pastors. In many quarters it is thought that this decision, at least if the Church Synod persists in it at the next meeting, will hasten a separation between Church and State.

The Bishops Warn Against the Use of Force and Pressure from Outside.

At a meeting in Stockholm on November 27th and 28th the Swedish bishops discussed the question of women pastors. A statement issued at this meeting points out that every effort to force the question as well as all pressure from outside make it difficult for the Church to find a solution. The bishops deplore the fact that the politicians pay no attention to the Church Synod's wish for time to reach greater clarity and unity. For the Church must decide its position after closely weighing the doctrine of the Bible and its interpretation while remembering that it is the Church's duty to bring the Gospel to the people. Anyone who attempts to penetrate into the Scriptures will soon see how serious and difficult a task it is to distinguish between that which concerns changeable arrangements and that which concerns the eternal message of salvation. The Church must seek clarity in calm reflection. Any use of force or pressure from outside will make it difficult for the Church to solve the problem.

The statement goes on to say that in whatever way the problem may be solved there is the risk of disastrous dissension. The recognition of women pastors would to a large group of people mean disobedience to the Word of God. The refusal to recognize them would be interpreted by another large group as the Church's lack of ability to create new forms of work in our time in obedience to the Scriptures. And this danger of dissension is still another reason why both sides need time to weigh the question more deeply.

The bishops repudiate any point of view maintaining that the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments is reserved for men pastors for reasons of dignity, as any such point of view has no foundation in Scripture. And they emphasize that any use of biblical statements must take into consideration the real change that has taken place in the social status of women.

The meeting was presided over by Bishop Torsten Ysander, Linköping, as Archbishop Brilioth is ill at present.

Bishop Says No to Woman Radio Preacher.

Last month Bishop Anders Nygren, Lund, refused his permission to let a woman theologian Brita Olén preach at a service to be transmitted from a church in Karlskrona belonging to the National Church.

The service had been planned by the radio adviser on church affairs, Rev. G. Dahmén in co-operation with the rector of the church in question, but when the Bishop heard of the plans he refused his permission on the grounds that a transmission of this kind might give listeners the false impression that the National Church had changed its attitude towards the whole question of women pastors.

The result was that the service was held in a Free Church chapel in Karlskrona where the woman pastor both preached and administered communion.

Instruction Given Prior to Confirmation to Be Modernized.

The greatly increasing number of young people will make increasing demands on the Swedish Church, for instance it is expected that the number of candidates for confirmation will rise to about 140,000 a year for the next few years. The Church realizes that this

will cause serious problems, especially in the suburbs of large cities where the number of young people is largest and there are not enough pastors to give the instruction. The form of instruction also greatly needs to be modernized. It has lagged much too far behind the schools of to-day where the children have grown used to modern methods of instruction and first class educational material.

A special committee of the Home Mission Board is working on this problem, and is to investigate experiences at home and abroad in this field. When the material has been gathered it is to be published in a guide for teachers of confirmation classes, and the guide will also contain directions on how a confirmation class-room should be equipped.

The training of youth leaders is also to be intensified, and there are plans of starting a special institute to train such leaders in connection with the Swedish Church's School for Laymen at Sigtuna.

1.000 Swedish Pastors Studying Modern Society.

About 1.000 Swedish pastors have participated in the courses in social organisation arranged by the social committee of the Home Mission Board with the purpose of giving the pastors a thorough knowledge of modern society.

It has been said with some justification that a Swedish pastor knows more about the order of St. Francis than of the relations of labour and employer organisations in modern society, but now an attempt is being made to remedy this deficiency and give the pastors a new outlook on modern man and his situation in home, society and work. The courses featured talks by speakers from the Employers' Federation, the labour unions, the Central Organisation of Civil Servants and the Agricultural Trade Organisations.

Church Call-Service in Stockholm.

From February 1st a church call-service will be opened in Stockholm to which people in desperate spiritual straits can telephone at any time if they wish to talk to a pastor. By special favour of the telephone company the pastoral call-service has been connected with a special number known by all Stockholmers as it is the same number they call to get in touch with the fire department or the police. - The initiative has been taken by among others the Bishop of Stockholm Dr. Helge Ljungberg.

